



The Holy See

***ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO HIS BEATITUDE CHRISTODOULOS
ARCHBISHOP OF ATHENS AND ALL GREECE***

Thursday, 14 December 2006

"Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ" (I Cor 1: 3).

Your Beatitude,

Dear Brothers in Christ who have accompanied the venerable Archbishop of Athens and All Greece on the occasion of our brotherly meeting, I greet you in the Lord.

I am happy to welcome you with deep joy, borrowing the words St Paul addressed "to the Church of God which is in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints together with all those who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ" (I Cor 1: 2).

In the Name of the Lord and with sincere and brotherly affection, I welcome you here among us in the Church of Rome and I thank God who has granted us to live this moment of grace and spiritual joy.

Your presence here revives within us the great Christian tradition that was born and developed in your beloved and glorious Country. Through reading Paul's Letters and the Acts of the Apostles, this tradition reminds us daily of the first Christian communities that came into being in Corinth, in Thessalonica and in Philippi. Thus, we remember St Paul's presence and preaching in Athens and his courageous proclamation of faith in the unknown God, revealed in Jesus Christ and in the message of the Resurrection, far from easy to understand for his contemporaries.

In the first chapter of the Letter to the Christians of Corinth, who were the first to experience the problems and grave temptations of division, we can see a timely message for all Christians.

Indeed, a real danger appears when people prefer to identify with one group rather than another, saying, "I belong to Paul" or "I belong to Apollos", or "I belong to Cephas". It was then that Paul asked the searching question. "Is Christ divided?" (I Cor 1: 13).

Greece and Rome have intensified their relations since the dawn of Christianity. They also kept up their contacts, which have given life to different forms of Christian communities and traditions in those regions of the world which in our day correspond to Eastern Europe and Western Europe.

These intense relations also helped to create a sort of osmosis in the formation of ecclesial institutions. While safeguarding the particular disciplinary, liturgical, theological and spiritual features of both traditions, the Roman and the Greek, this osmosis has brought the Church's evangelizing activity and the inculturation of the Christian faith to fruition.

Today, our relations are being resumed, slowly but in depth and with the concern for authenticity. They are an opportunity for us to discover a whole new range of spiritual expressions, rich in meaning and in mutual commitment. We thank God for this.

The memorable [Visit to Athens in 2001](#) of my venerable Predecessor, Pope John Paul II, in the context of his Pilgrimage in St Paul's footsteps, stands as a milestone in the gradual intensification of our contacts and collaboration.

During this Pilgrimage, Pope John Paul II was welcomed with honour and respect by Your Beatitude and by the Holy Synod of the Church of Greece, and we remember in particular the moving meeting at the Areopagus where St Paul preached. This pilgrimage also resulted in the exchange of priest and student delegations.

Moreover, I do not wish to, nor could I, forget the fruitful collaboration which has been established between the *Apostoliki Diakonia* and the Vatican Apostolic Library. Such initiatives contribute to our reciprocal practical knowledge and I have no doubt that they will have a part to play in fostering new relations between the Church of Greece and the Church of Rome.

If we turn our gaze to the future, Your Beatitude, we have before our eyes a vast field in which our cultural and pastoral collaboration could develop.

The various European countries are working to create a new Europe, which cannot be exclusively economic. Catholics and Orthodox are called to make their cultural and especially their spiritual contribution.

Indeed, it is their duty to defend the Christian roots of the Continent that have shaped it down the ages and thereby enable the expression of the Christian tradition to continue; it is also their duty to do their utmost to safeguard the dignity of the human person and respect for minorities, taking

care to avoid a cultural homogenization that might lead to the loss of immense riches of civilization.

It is likewise right to work to protect human rights which include the principle of individual freedom, especially religious freedom. These rights must be promoted and defended in the European Union and in each one of its Member States.

At the same time, it would also be appropriate to develop collaboration between Christians in each country of the European Union so as to be able to face the new risks that confront the Christian faith: in other words, the growing secularization, relativism and nihilism that pave the way to forms of behaviour, and even legislation, that undermine the inalienable dignity of the human being and call into question such fundamental institutions as marriage.

It is urgently necessary to undertake common pastoral activities that will be a common witness in the eyes of our contemporaries and will prepare us to account for the hope that is in us.

Your presence here in Rome, Your Beatitude, is the sign of this common commitment. For her part, the Catholic Church has a deep desire to do everything possible for our *rapprochement*, with a view to achieving full communion between Catholics and Orthodox and, for the time being, to encourage pastoral collaboration at all possible levels, so that the Gospel may be proclaimed and the Name of God blessed.

Your Beatitude, I renew my good wishes and cordial welcome to you and to the beloved brothers who have accompanied you on your visit. As I entrust you to the intercession of the *Theotokos*, I ask the Lord to pour out upon you an abundance of heavenly Blessings.

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